

Evaluation of the United Nations Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF 2017-2021)

Management Response from the MSDF Regional Steering Committee

JUNE 2022



UNITED NATIONS
CARIBBEAN



BACKGROUND

The Evaluation of the Multi-Country Sustainable Development Framework (MSDF) reviewed the implementation of complex and layered interventions across the 18 MSDF countries in the period 2017-2021. These interventions were implemented by a range of UN agencies and a series of government and inter-governmental stakeholders at national and regional levels.

The Evaluation itself was conducted under COVID-19 conditions, precluding the evaluator's travel to the region. Despite the associated challenges, and its very broad scope, the Evaluation presents an important record of the MSDF's achievements and its innovative features.

Upon review, the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) for the MSDF believes that a more in-depth study could better have described the genesis of the first MSDF and the context within which it was designed. Some of this context would help explain the shortcomings of the MSDF. In addition, the RSC notes that the Evaluation was not able to assess changes (positive and negative) resulting from the introduction of wider reforms to the UN Development System (from late 2018).

These reservations notwithstanding, the Evaluation was endorsed by the MSDF Regional Steering Committee in June 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

The present Management Response takes this initial endorsement further. It reflects the specific responses of the RSC to the nine Evaluation recommendations. The Management Response serves as a sign of the commitment of UN Country Teams in Barbados and the OECS, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago (as well as the various Member States in which these Country Teams operate; and as represented by the MSDCF Regional Steering Committee) to address and respond to the findings of the Evaluation.

Recommendations 1 and 2 relate to the **design of multi-country cooperation frameworks**, and to **results-based management respectively**. The recommendations provided are accepted: the new MSDCF for 2022-2026 has already adopted clearer "theories of change" and established a common, SDG-based results framework. The Regional Steering Committee also acknowledges the criticality of improving the availability of SDG-related data (to enable approximate, region-wide assessment of the achievement of Agenda 2030) and the importance of robust and regular monitoring and evaluation of the projects of Agencies, Funds and Programmes (to determine the overall performance of the MSDCF). The proposed response to Recommendation 2 carries the greatest resource implications: *without* significant additional resources and technical expertise directed towards strengthening data collection and collation, verified, trusted data for the certification of SDG progress will not be available when the MSDCF ends in 2026.

Recommendations 3 and 4 relate to **inter-Agency coordination, cooperation and strategic planning**. The recommendations are partially accepted. The RSC acknowledges that with time, the implications and benefits of the UN Reform process will become better known across all development stakeholders in the region. In addition, as a result of the new coordination capacities provided to the Resident Coordinator's Offices, the UN System should now be equipped to deliver a more efficient and effective response to the multiple development challenges in the Caribbean region. At the same time, the RSC notes that variations in planning cycles across Agencies, Funds and Programmes, and differences in the way that particular Agencies are configured across the region will obstruct the transition to 'frictionless coordination'.

Recommendations 5 and 6 cover **joint implementation and resource mobilization respectively**. The RSC accepts the recommendations on **joint implementation**, acknowledging that the MSDCF construct offers (as yet un-used) scope to create greater efficiencies, notably with respect to joint programming,

communications, shared analysis and the mainstreaming of normative agendas. With respect to **resource mobilization**, the RSC does not accept the recommendations on the basis that a shift to resource mobilization at a *regional* level is at odds with the current configuration of Agencies, donors, and national governments. However, the RSC does acknowledge that some of the specific advice provided in the Evaluation can be integrated into national/sub-regional-level Resource Mobilization & Partnerships Strategies (RMPS).

Recommendation 7 addresses opportunities to **further engagement with civil society and the private sector**, whilst recommendation 8 relates to weaknesses in **knowledge management, record keeping, and documentation**. The RSC partially accepts Recommendation 7 (but as with R6, has determined that national/sub-regional-level RMPS are best suited to setting out UNCT engagements with civil society and the private sector). The RSC accepts Recommendation 8 and is proposing the establishment of a set of common standards to improve knowledge management.

Recommendation 9 relates to the **alignment of UN programmes to national policy initiatives**, and the **tracking of 'pilot projects' for their eventual scale-up**. The RSC accepts the recommendations.

The present Management Response was endorsed in June 2022.

RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: MSDCF Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a common SDG-based results framework • Reduce the number of CF Outcome Indicators • Develop (a) theory(ies) of change for the CF • Strengthen CF monitoring system (see also Rec. 2) • Evaluate results and impact more regularly (see also Rec. 2) 		Accepted	
Explanation <p>With respect to MSDCF design, the Evaluation recommends the adoption of an SDG-based regional results framework, a reduction in the number of outcome indicators, and the introduction of defined theories of change. Related proposals relating to improvements in the use of data and strengthened CF monitoring and evaluation are covered under Recommendation 2, below.</p> <p>The RSC for the MSDCF 2022-2026 accepts the recommendations, which are aligned with standard UN guidance on development of new generation cooperation frameworks.</p> <p>Several of the recommendations have already been adopted during the design of MSDCF 2022-2026. The new CF includes theories of change for all eight of its Outcomes. The Outcome Indicators are all drawn from the standard SDG Indicator set. Country- or sub-regional results frameworks (i.e. the CIPs) all use the same Outcomes and Outcome Indicators.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
1. SDG-based results framework estd.	RSC / RCOs	Complete	Neutral
2. Reduce number of Outcome Indicators	RPMT	Mid-2022	Neutral
3. Develop CF Theories of Change	RSC	Complete	Neutral

RECOMMENDATION 2: Results-Based Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen data infrastructure / ecosystems • Engage CARICOM, ECLAC and UNDESA on data • Invest fully in M&E plan for the MSDCF 		Accepted	
Explanation <p>Expanding on Recommendation 1, the Evaluation identifies critical gaps in the Results Based Management (RBM) of the MSDF. These gaps relate to the identification, collation, coordination and management of data that is critical to determine progress towards the SDGs, and the effectiveness of the MSDF itself. The Evaluation recommends a stronger emphasis on M&E, investment in adequate data infrastructure, coordination and engagement with key data stakeholders in the region (notably CARICOM, ECLAC and UN DESA) and the reflection of all of the above in a robust M&E plan for the MSDCF (led by a Regional Programme Management Team [RPMT]). Additional recommendations include the training of staff in Results-Based Management.</p> <p>The RSC for the MSDCF 2022-2026 accepts the recommendations.</p> <p>Some of the recommendations have been addressed in the design of the new MSDCF. The new Terms of Reference for the RPMT identify the setting of standards for the monitoring and evaluation of the Cooperation Framework as a principal responsibility for this inter-agency coordination mechanism. The</p>			

<p>RPMT has already identified the further refinement of the MSDCF Results Framework (in particular the collection of data for the Outcome Indicators) as a key priority.</p> <p>Actions to address the remaining recommendations are set out below. The RSC acknowledges that whilst some of the challenges relating to data can be addressed through MSDCF agency actions alone, others will require external engagement with inter-governmental bodies in the region. As such “data” is likely to become one of the “substantive policy agendas” requiring coordinated regional work led by RCs across the whole period 2022-2026.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Produce a robust M&E Plan for the MSDCF, including scheduling of mid-term review and end-of-CF Evaluation	RPMT	Q4 2022	\$0.1m
Position ‘data’ as one of the ‘substantive regional policy issues’ for RC / RSC action (including CARICOM, UN DESA and ECLAC)	RSC	Q4 2022	\$0.5m

<p>RECOMMENDATION 3: Strengthening Inter-Agency Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolster the Regional Steering Committee • Strengthen country/sub-regional “Results Groups” • Streamline the multitude of inter-agency groups • Fully invest in mapping/configuration of Agency presence regionally, sub-regionally, and nationally 	<p>Partially accepted</p>		
<p>Explanation</p> <p>The Evaluation highlights a number of the challenges in delivering a coordinated Cooperation Framework across 18 countries and territories through a variety of UNCTs, RCOs and Agencies, Funds and Programmes that are configured differently. It refers to the “Virtual Policy Network” system that was established under MSDF 2017-2021 and calls for the strengthening of inter-agency coordination mechanisms.</p> <p>The RSC for the MSDCF 2022-2026 partially accepts the recommendations. The RSC recognizes Agencies, Funds and Programmes appetite to use regional <i>fora</i> and discussions to discuss <i>substantive</i> thematic/policy issues. Meanwhile, in line with the mandatory requirements of the Cooperation Framework, a “configuration exercise” will be conducted in 2022 to better determine the overall capability and future needs of the UN System in the Caribbean based on its current footprint. Further, the RSC considers the “Issues-Based Coalitions” (IBCs) of the new Regional Collaboration Platform (RCP) as a useful mechanism to draw down on substantive policy expertise in the region.</p> <p>However, the RSC also notes difficulties of (a) bolstering regional coordination systems <i>whilst</i> (b) streamlining the multitude of working groups. As such, the RSC insists that with respect to both regional and national coordination mechanisms, “form should follow function”: the regional governance architecture (as set out in the MSDCF ToRs) should remain subject to intermittent review, whilst national/sub-regional coordination mechanisms should be set up in step with the requirements of UNCTs and RCs.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Complete CF “Configuration Exercise”	RCOs	Q3 2022	Neutral
Engage with RBC IBCs as required	RSC / UNCTs	Q4 2022	Neutral

RECOMMENDATION 4: Planning		Partially accepted	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote awareness of UN Reform among all Agencies RCOs to better synthesize DCO planning processes with Agency planning commitments. 			
Explanation			
<p>The Evaluation recommends that the purpose and parameters of UN Reform be better coordinated among all staff, and that RCOs should ensure the most efficient possible matching of DCO/Secretariat planning processes and Agency/Fund/Programme planning purposes.</p> <p>The RSC for the MSDCF 2022-2026 partially accepts the recommendations, noting that familiarity with UN Reform and its critical components (A/RES/72/279 on the Repositioning of the UN Development System; the Management & Accountability Framework of the UN Development and Resident Coordinator System) will grow over time.</p> <p>The RSC (and RCOs) acknowledges the sometimes-duplicative nature of DCO/Secretariat and Agency planning processes, and commits to aligning these where possible, noting that so long as multiple planning processes exist, frictionless co-operation will remain challenging.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Disseminate / participate in DCO/Secretariat-based information sharing on UN Reform	RCOs	Q4 2022	Neutral

RECOMMENDATION 5: Joint implementation		Accepted	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCTs to create incentives for joint programmes Develop a joint regional communications strategy Improve regional approaches to gender mainstreaming Disseminate the findings of relevant research Pool resources for shared thematic training 			
Explanation			
<p>The Evaluation highlights that not all of the potential benefits/efficiencies of a multi-country cooperation framework are currently being exploited. It recommends that UNCTs identify incentives for joint programming; that a regional communications and advocacy strategy be formulated; that common approaches are adopted to pursue gender mainstreaming; that shared research and analysis be conducted; and that further opportunities are identified to deliver thematic training across the region.</p> <p>The RSC for the MSDCF 2022-2026 accepts the recommendations. The formulation of Country Implementation Plans demonstrates areas of programmatic work where there is already a concentration of Agencies, potentially revealing opportunities for joint programming. A joint guide to communications and branding has been developed. In addition, the RSC is committed to the production of a limited set of shared analytical products (on substantive policy issues affecting the region, like data; and the updating of the Common Multi-Country Analysis). Additional actions are listed below.</p>			
Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Proposal for cross-regional “UN System Sector-wide action plan” (SWAP) and gender scorecard exercise to be put to the RSC	RPMT	Q4 2022	\$50k

<p>RECOMMENDATION 6: Resource Mobilization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure accurate reporting of UN resource mobilization and expenditure on UN INFO • Develop a Joint regional Resource Mobilization Strategy • Direct resource mobilization efforts strategically (i.e. to largest sources of funding) • Cooperate with CARICOM on Resource Mobilization • Pursue opportunities for co-financing of projects with IFIs and Governments • Systematically explore partnerships with private sector. 	<p>Not accepted</p>
--	----------------------------

Explanation

In view of the enduring “SDG funding gap”, the Evaluation makes a series of practical recommendations with respect to accurate reporting of financial data by UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, and the wider topic of resource mobilization, notably calls to: make resource mobilization efforts more strategic; cooperate with governments, inter-governmental bodies and IFIs on co-financing models; establish novel private sector partnerships.

Whilst these recommendations are welcome, given the current configuration of RCOs, UNCTs and Agencies, Funds and Programmes, the differences in “outputs” and “sub-outputs” across CIPs, and the preferences of donors, the majority of these recommendations are best applied at country (or sub-regional) level, rather than at the regional level. As such, **the RSC does not accept the recommendation** to develop a joint regional resource mobilization strategy.

Instead, Resource Mobilization & Partnerships Strategies (RMPS) should be developed at national/sub-regional level, incorporating the recommendations above. Accurate reporting of financials in UN INFO is to be promoted. In addition, the RSC proposes to designate the wider topic of “Financing for Development” as one of the substantive policy/advocacy agenda items to be addressed by the RSC (with CARICOM and the RCP IBCs).

Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Position ‘Financing for Development’ as one of the ‘substantive regional policy issues’ for RC / RSC action (including CARICOM, UN DESA and ECLAC)	RSC	Q4 2022	\$50k

<p>RECOMMENDATION 4: Civil Society and the Private Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop more effective engagement of civil society • Step up engagement with the private sector 	<p>Partially accepted</p>
---	----------------------------------

Explanation

The Evaluation recommends that the UN engage civil society more effectively, from the CF design phase through to the monitoring and scrutiny of CF results. In addition, the Evaluation proposes that private sector actors be engaged more deliberately in order to promote the greater alignment of private sector investments with the SDGs.

The **RSC partially accepts these recommendations**. As with Recommendation 6, the proposals put forward by the Evaluation are likely to be best carried through at national level, via national or sub-regional Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Strategies (RMPSs).

Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
RMPSSs to properly consider the role of civil society and the private sector in supporting achievement of the SDGs	RCOs	Q4 2022	Neutral

RECOMMENDATION 8: Knowledge management, record keeping, and culture of documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a regional knowledge management platform Put in place standards for the recording, storage, management and retrieval of information 	Accepted
--	-----------------

Explanation

The evaluation identified considerable gaps in MSDF archiving and knowledge management. Given the regional nature of the endeavor, the attrition of staff and the effects of the reform, the Evaluation argues that a more functional system is required to ensure continuity and access to past documents, projects and initiatives of the original MSDF. It recommends developing archival infrastructure, both institutional and ICT, to allow a free flow of information between the UNCTs.

The **RSC accepts the recommendations** and makes provision for their adoption as below.

Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
Teams (or equivalent) to be designated as the common repository for MSDCF documentation (at regional & UNCT level)	RCOs	Q4 2022	Neutral
Common standards for recording, storing, managing and retrieving information are to be established	RPMT	Q4 2022	Neutral

RECOMMENDATION 9: Scaling-up and Policy Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking the performance of pilots over time Policy alignment 	Accepted
--	-----------------

Explanation

The Evaluation recommends that where development activities are designated as “pilots”, they be treated as such, meaning that results, lessons, experiences and good practices be recorded. In addition, the Evaluation recommends that the UN’s development programming be more closely/directly aligned to national policy development so that there can be stronger attribution of UN contributions to national development processes.

The **RSC accepts the recommendations**.

Actions to be taken	Responsible entities	Timeframe	Resource implication
N/A			



UNITED NATIONS
CARIBBEAN

